

and force them and require them to do this every single year. It is time our Federal Government started operating in a way that makes fiscal sense. I think the American people understand very clearly what this is about. This is about spending. It is about getting Washington to live within its means, to quit borrowing 40 cents out of every dollar it spends, and to put this country on a path fiscally that will ensure we do not bankrupt the country for future generations, and that we get our economy back in a place where it can start growing and creating the jobs we need to get people in this country back to work.

I see the Senator from Utah. I expect he will have some remarks about this subject. There are many of us on this side, I know, who are anxious to vote and certainly are doing everything we can to facilitate this process where we deal with the crisis before us next week, but, importantly, do it in a way that addresses the fundamental issue here which is not the debt limit, it is the debt.

It is time Washington started living within its means, started to make sure we have got a pathway in place for not only cutting spending today but dealing with the long-term issue by putting a balanced budget amendment in our Constitution. I hope my colleagues will join us in this legislation that will come before us sometime we hope later today, and it will be yet another attempt to address this issue. I implore my colleagues here, I think we are going to get most of the Republicans to vote for this. I hope there will be some on the other side who will join us in this endeavor. It is too important to the future of this country not to.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of Colorado.) The Senator from Utah is recognized.

Mr. HATCH. I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to finish my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, before turning to the issue of the moment, I want to thank my dear friend for his good remarks here on the floor of the Senate. He is a great leader, a great human being, and he certainly outlined, I think in a fair way, some of the problems and some of the solutions we might have here on the floor.

But before turning to the issue of the moment, the need to restore the Nation's fiscal stability by reducing our deficits and debt, I want to return to a matter I discussed on the floor yesterday, and that is the FAA reauthorization bill.

I must respond to some of the comments made by two of my colleagues earlier today regarding one of the major sticking points in our efforts to pass the FAA reauthorization bill.

Their arguments are, to put it quite simply, fallacious and cannot go unanswered.

As you might expect, these comments were regarding the provision in the House bill affecting the way votes are counted in union elections in the airline industry. My colleagues, the senior Senator from West Virginia and the junior Senator from Iowa, characterize the House's actions as some sort of radical endeavor, a change that lacks justification and common sense.

In fact, the Senator from West Virginia even argued that the House's provisions would "undo 75 years of labor law."

These were his exact words. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the claim is so far from being accurate I simply have to assume that my good friend, Senator ROCKEFELLER, simply misspoke. I know this is the line the labor unions and the administration are peddling, but here is the truth: The House of Representatives or Senate Republicans are not trying to undo 75 years of labor law, it is the National Mediation Board—or NMB, I will call it—that has already done so in a highly partisan fashion.

It is the NMB, controlled by pro-union appointees of President Obama that in a partisan way unilaterally undid 75 years of labor law, and put their finger on the scale for the unions that bankroll Democratic political campaigns.

I know what I am talking about. I won the American Jurisprudence prize for labor law. I have led labor fights on the floor for our side for the last 35 years. House and Senate Republicans are only trying to restore long-lasting labor law following its highly partisan corruption by the National Mediation Board. This is not an opinion. This is fact.

Put the talking points and revisionist history aside, this is what you have: a highly partisan NMB changing 75 years of settled law, settled labor law, to benefit the Democrats' political allies. For 75 years, NMB-supervised elections required that a union receive the votes of a majority of the entire workforce before it can be certified. That has been the law. There is good reason for it. This was not just a mathematical trick to disadvantage unions, as my colleagues have argued. It is plain common sense.

Let's suppose, for example, that only 50 percent of a proposed bargaining unit votes in a union election, and the union wins by a very slim majority of the votes cast. In that case, a union representative would be certified with only the demonstrated support of one-fourth of the bargaining unit. That is what would happen if we follow the language the NMB fallaciously put into their ruling. One-quarter of a workforce could vote to certify a union and bind every other coworker to have to live with that decision. Apparently a commitment to Democratic and true majority rule only matters to the left

when it suits them. What is going on in this country is outrageous, not just at the National Mediation Board but the NLRB as well. Democratic radicals, very brilliant labor lawyers, who do not give a darn about what the law is, are now starting to change the laws by regulatory fiat.

Apparently a commitment to democratic and true majority rule only matters when it suits certain people's politics.

The Senator from Iowa compared these votes to Senate and schoolboard elections, suggesting that only a majority of those voting is necessary to prevail. This is a misguided comparison. First, union elections are not a choice among competing representatives. They are, instead, held to determine whether the workers want to be represented at all. Even setting that aside, how many schoolboards are going to be empowered to make decisions that affect every hour of every day an employee goes to work? How many Senators are elected to serve a small, narrowly defined group of constituents? And, in the end, if your vote is not counted in a Senate or schoolboard election, you will get another chance to vote a few years down the line.

Employees voting in these union elections have no such options. That is why the law has been completely different from what my two friends and colleagues have said on the floor. Requiring the support of the majority of the whole unit before certifying a union representative only makes common sense. This is why the procedure at NMB used for these elections went unchanged for 75 years. Boards appointed by Democratic Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Johnson, Carter, and Clinton all agreed with that process that the House bill is only attempting to restore.

In fact, the NMB appointed by President Carter unanimously ruled it did not have authority to administratively change the form of the NMB's ballot used in representation elections, and that such a change, if appropriate, can only be made by Congress. That makes sense.

Yet today we have an administration bent on greasing the rails in favor of the unions, and a Democratic Senate all too willing to go along with it. They are so willing that they have opted to stall passage of the FAA reauthorization to prevent Congress from restoring a system that served the Nation and airline industry well for decades. This is another example of the administration showing its true colors. Rather than provide certainty to travelers, the transportation industry, and airports, they are holding up a long-term FAA reauthorization in order to benefit their union allies. It is wrong. This type of thing should not go on. Nor should the National Mediation Board be issuing what ought to be congressional decisions.

I wish we were not having this debate. I wish we could get this FAA reauthorization done. I want to get it done. I don't want anybody furloughed, but these are important issues. This isn't some itty-bitty nonessential issue. I am not going to yield on this issue. I will not let an out-of-control National Mediation Board and their patrons in Congress and the White House rig the rules so a small minority can jam unionization on unwilling employees.

I expect we will be debating this issue for some time. I am willing to have the debate in full view of the public. But, at the very least, I expect my colleagues to acknowledge the truth as to what has transpired at the National Mediation Board. It is not the House of Representatives that has taken a radical position; it is the Obama administration, and some of my colleagues on the other side should know better.

Let me add a couple of other things. I don't enjoy the fact that people are being furloughed. But it is not Republicans who are holding this bill up. It is those people demanding outrageous changes in the law by individuals who were never elected to make those changes. We ought to fire that whole doggone National Mediation Board—or at least the Democrats on the board, who don't seem to care about what the law is.

And it is the same with the NLRB. At least one of them, and maybe more, could not make it through this process and had to be recess appointed. They could care less about what the laws are, and they want to change them without proper congressional approval. It is outrageous. It is not something my friends on the other side should encourage. It just makes sense.

All those Democratic Presidents, until now, have honored that 75-year history of how votes should be taken in union elections. Unions win over 60 percent of their union elections. The system is not unfair. They lose some, sure. But to stack the rules so they can win every time is not right either. It certainly isn't democratic. It is wrong for those employees who didn't have the opportunity, or didn't vote. It is wrong. You can have 10 people vote in a 100-person union, and if 6 vote for it, under their rule, that would change the rule for all 94 of the others. That is what we are ignoring. So much for that. All I can say is I don't want to have anyone whining from the other side, because they are the ones who are holding up the FAA reauthorization. And they are doing it for the most crass of reasons.

THE DEBT CEILING

Turning to the matter that is consuming the Nation, I want to address the so-called August 2 deadline we hit next week.

In early April of this year, Treasury Secretary Geithner informed Congress that Treasury might run out of ways to stay at the debt limit and have enough cash to pay its bills around July 8.

About a month and a half later, on May 16, the Treasury Secretary updated his guess to August 2.

This August 2 deadline, which the administration has insisted is when Treasury runs out of sufficient cash to pay bills, was estimated back in the middle of May. It is only reasonable to expect that Congress would be kept apprised of Treasury's cashflow status and estimates. If we indeed face an economic catastrophe on August 2, it is only reasonable to expect warnings from those in government responsible for issuing such updates and monitoring threats to our financial stability.

We have a group in government that is charged with that responsibility. It is called the Financial Stability Oversight Council, or FSOC, set up in the Dodd-Frank financial regulation law. The FSOC is chaired by the Treasury Secretary and composed of members such as the Federal Reserve Chairman and banking regulations czars. Indeed, the FSOC was sold by Democrats as a body that would be able to spot threats to our financial system and then warn and protect us all.

The President, Treasury officials, the President's Press Secretary, and others in the administration daily warn of catastrophe, crisis, and the potential for conditions even worse than we saw during the financial crisis. They seem to be channeling Dr. Peter Venkman, who, faced with another catastrophe, once predicted a disaster of biblical proportions—human sacrifice, dogs and cats living together, mass hysteria.

Yet through all these predictions, the FSOC has essentially remained silent. That body of unelected bureaucrats either doesn't see an impending threat to stability from the debt limit impasse, or from a ratings downgrade for the United States, or it is too busy writing a mountain of new regulations to make a warning.

I sent a letter, which I wish to have printed in the RECORD, to eight voting members of the FSOC yesterday, asking two basic sets of questions. I ask unanimous consent that that be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE,
Washington, DC, July 27, 2011.

Hon. TIMOTHY GEITHNER,
Secretary, Department of the Treasury, Washington, DC.

Hon. BEN BERNANKE,
Chairman, Board of Governors, The Federal Reserve System, Washington, DC.

Hon. GARY GENSLER,
Chairman, Commodity Futures Trading Commission, Washington, DC.

Hon. MARY SCHAPIRO,
Chairman, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Washington, DC.

MARTIN J. GRUENBERG,
Acting Chairperson, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Washington, DC.

EDWARD DEMARCO,
Acting Director, Federal Housing Finance Agency, Washington, DC.

Hon. DEBBIE MATZ,
Chairman, National Credit Union Administration, Alexandria, VA.

JOHN WALSH,
Acting Comptroller, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY GEITHNER, CHAIRMEN BERNANKE, GENSLER, MATZ, SHAPIRO, ACTING CHAIRPERSON GRUENBERG, ACTING DIRECTOR DEMARCO, AND ACTING COMPTROLLER WALSH: The President, on July 25, spoke to the American public about risks associated with failure to raise the statutory debt limit, saying that: "We would risk sparking a deep economic crisis. . . ." The President warns of a deep crisis and risks to financial stability.

You, the voting members of the Financial Stability Oversight Council (FSOC), are charged by the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act with the responsibility to identify risks and potential emerging threats to the financial stability of the United States.

Does the Council agree with the President's assessment that possible failure to raise the statutory debt limit by sometime in early August represents an emerging threat to the financial stability of the United States?

Does any voting Council member dissent from whatever is the majority view of the Council? If so, please explain precisely why.

Neither the Minutes of the FSOC July 13, 2011 meeting nor the Annual Report of the FSOC, which was approved on July 22, 2011, identify possible failure to raise the statutory debt limit by August 2 as an imminent risk to the financial stability of the United States worthy of a warning to the American people, and do not come close to recent statements by Treasury officials warning of "catastrophe."

In addition to inquiring about the Council's views on possible risks to financial stability, I write to ask the Council and its voting members about their current knowledge of recent Treasury cash inflows and outflows and projections of those cash flows, daily, through the month of August.

Treasury officials have warned that based on actual and projected revenues and expenditures, along with potential exhaustion of available "extraordinary measures" to avoid breach of the statutory debt limit, the United States will exhaust its borrowing authority under the limit and possibly run out of available cash to pay obligations of the federal government that are due.

Unfortunately, Congress and the American people do not have sufficient information about Treasury's actual and projected revenues, expenditures, and cash flows to make informed judgments. Many Americans and members of Congress are, unfortunately, relying on estimates and projections from either large Wall Street financial institutions

or non-governmental organizations often labeled "think tanks." The lack of information is unsatisfactory.

In a May 2, 2011 letter to Congress, Treasury Secretary Geithner stated that as a result of stronger than anticipated tax receipts, Treasury then estimated that extraordinary measures to provide headroom under the statutory debt limit would be exhausted on August 2, 2011. Since that time, more data have become available. Some reports since that time have indicated that receipts may have been turning out higher than previously expected. Further, the Federal Reserve's July 2011 Monetary Policy Report to the Congress identifies that "Federal receipts have risen rapidly lately—they are up about 10 percent in the first eight months of fiscal 2011 compared with the same period in fiscal 2010."

I recognize that receipts and Treasury's cash inflows and outflows can be lumpy and are stochastic. However, the date at which extraordinary measures available to Treasury become exhausted, and cash inflows may prove insufficient to meet incoming obligations that are due, has almost surely changed from the August 2 date estimated by Treasury on May 2. Given incoming data since May 2, does August 2 remain the date with the highest statistical likelihood of being the point in time at which Treasury will run out of extraordinary measures to provide additional headroom under the debt limit and will face insufficient cash inflows relative to obligations that are coming due?

Please provide, by 5:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time on Thursday, July 28, detailed information known by the Council and by any voting member on:

Actual revenues and expenditures through July 27;

Projected or actual daily Treasury cash inflows and outflows for each day between July 28 and August 31, along with methods used to make projections;

Whether, given current projections of cash inflows and obligations coming due, Treasury would run out of cash and not have sufficient cash available to meet all obligations that become due on any date between August 2 and August 31 (projections here mean point estimates, with the acknowledgement that projections are inherently uncertain);

Any cash or liquid accounts available (presently or any time during August) to Treasury, such as Treasury's \$5 billion liquid balance sitting idle in its Supplementary Financing Program Account at the Federal Reserve, established to allegedly assist the Federal Reserve with management of its balance sheet during the financial crisis (the Daily Statement of cash and debt operations of the United States Treasury for Monday, July 25, 2011 indicates that the \$5 billion was available to Treasury on that date);

Current values of securities and other marketable assets available (presently or any time during August) to Treasury, including mortgage-backed securities and other financial claims amassed by Treasury during the recent financial crisis, which could be liquidated and converted to cash (my request is for total values, not an assessment of the advisability of asset sales);

Contingency plans for generation of cash within Treasury in the event that the statutory debt limit is not raised by August 2, 2011;

Contingency plans of regulators of financial institutions, including any plans for regulatory forbearance, in the event of a ratings downgrade of United States Treasury debt securities;

Contingency plans of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in the event of a ratings downgrade of United States Treasury debt securi-

ties, including plans related to "breaking of the buck" by a money market mutual fund, disruptions in the tri-party repo market, disruptions in payment systems or systemically important financial utilities, or creation of programs or facilities with broad-based eligibility under authorities provided by Section 1101 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act;

Any private assurances by any government officials to any financial institution or significant financial market participant that the United States Treasury will not fail to pay principal and interest on Treasury securities even if the statutory debt limit is not raised.

As Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, with a responsibility for oversight of our sovereign debt and Treasury's cash management practices, I am deeply concerned about the lack of information about upcoming cash flows and reliance of Congress and the American people on non-governmental projections of those flows in decisionmaking. Time is of the essence, and I require, as I stated, the information that I have requested by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Thursday, July 28. Please contact Jeff Wrase at 202-224-4515.

Sincerely,

ORRIN G. HATCH,
Ranking Member.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, one is whether they see any imminent threat to financial stability from the debt limit impasse, or from an impending downgrade to our Nation's credit rating. Of course, we face warnings of downgrades of our credit rating not merely because of the debt limit impasse; we have had dozens of such impasses in recent decades, with no effect on our credit rating. Yet we do face warnings of a ratings downgrade because of President Obama's acceleration of deficits and debt along our unsustainable fiscal path and unsustainable entitlement promises.

With spending as a share of the economy up to levels not seen since World War II, and a lack of willingness by the administration to break its deficit spending addiction, ratings agencies have been brought to the edge and warn of impending downgrades. Those downgrades would immediately harm job creation, the economy, the cost of credit for every American family and business, and, indeed, overall financial stability.

However, instead of a forthright discussion of this threat, the FSOC chose to instead bury an academic discussion of it in their annual report. Let me remind everyone how important Democrats said the FSOC would be as an early warning system, protecting us from the imminent threats to stability. It was supposed to be a watchdog, a cop on the beat combing global financial markets for imbalances and stability threats, and then giving warning to everyone.

The President, the Treasury Secretary, ratings agencies, Secretary of State, Fed Chairman Bernanke, admirals, investors, former administration officials across party lines—all have issued warnings of threats to financial stability from our fiscal crisis. Yet the FSOC buried whatever observation it

has about our crisis in its annual report.

Another set of questions I asked the FSOC involves Treasury's cashflows through August and the date at which Treasury now believes it is most likely to run short of cash. I asked about contingency plans that Treasury, the Fed, and bank regulators have if there is a ratings downgrade. Reports of meetings of Treasury Secretary Geithner, Fed Chairman Bernanke, and New York Fed President Dudley suggest that contingency plans certainly are in the works.

Yet as the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, the administration has provided me with no information on what those plans might be, in spite of my responsibility for oversight of debt and cash operations at Treasury. I wish I could say I was surprised, but the fact is, the promise of the most open, deliberative, and rational administration in history has given way to a highly secretive and partisan operation that denies the people of this country the leadership they are owed.

Perhaps I am supposed to wait, as in the past, for news reports on Sunday afternoon before the opening of financial markets in Asia to find out what we would do if an economic catastrophe in fact unfolds.

It is an unsatisfactory and unacceptable state of affairs that the American people and Members of Congress do not have updated and sufficient information about Treasury's cashflows and liquid assets, or the contingency plans of our financial regulators. It is disturbing to me that in recent days Members of Congress in both Chambers have gone to their respective floors to discuss Treasury's cash and liquidity position using information supplied either by large Wall Street financial institutions, or by nongovernmental think tanks.

Press reports of the U.S. Treasury's financial condition have also been relying on these sources. Why? Why do Members of Congress not know details of Treasury's projected cashflows for August? Why are we relying on dated numbers Treasury gave us months ago? How can we decide whether August 2, a threshold date estimated by Treasury back in May, is even close to some sort of deadline date for dealing with the debt limit?

Maybe the date is July 29. I don't know, and neither the administration nor the FSOC has told us. Maybe the date is August 15. I don't know, and neither the administration nor the FSOC has told us. I don't know. The American people don't know. This is unacceptable.

Wall Street firms have recently put out their own projections and say that August 2 may not be relevant at all. Maybe it will be August 8 when Treasury runs into a cashflow problem. Maybe it will be August 13. Does Treasury still believe August 2 is the date when cashflow problems are most likely to arrive, given new information on

government receipts since early May? If not, we need to know, and we need to know how that assessment has been made. If so, then why is Treasury not telling us and showing us why?

My letter to FSOC members, which includes the Treasury Secretary, includes a request for updated information about Treasury cashflows and liquid assets. Given warnings from the administration that there is special urgency to act by August 2, time is of the essence, so I asked to receive responses from the FSOC members by 5 o'clock today, which is now an hour and a half ago. I have received no reply about Treasury cashflows and liquid assets. Nothing. Radio silence.

Television cameras can't be turned on in this town without capturing some administration official reminding Americans about the looming default, but they are unable to provide Congress with the numbers that would show when the default would happen, after all these months of recommending we should know, and after warnings months ago.

Let me say this again. I asked for, and have not received, critical information about the state of our Nation's short-term finances that I specifically requested from eight voting members of the FSOC, including the Secretary of the Treasury.

I have received no response at all regarding the cash and liquid assets Treasury has and expects to have available. But worse than the refusal by the Treasury Secretary and the FSOC members to inform us about the Nation's cash position is their refusal to keep the American people duly informed about the state of our finances. It is, quite simply, a shirking of their responsibility to the citizens of this country. Rather than providing transparency—which we were promised—the administration has chosen to scare Social Security recipients about their benefits in politicized debt-limit negotiations.

We are debating debt and deficit plans that involve trillions of dollars. Yet we only have guesses about how much cash the Federal Government expects to have in August from a non-government think tank and from Wall Street firms. This is unacceptable.

Mr. President, one of the most troubling aspects of this lack of disclosure is the way it is affecting our Nation's seniors. I listened to my constituents in Utah, and many of them who rely on Social Security are very worried, and they are, frankly, scared. The Obama administration has been hard at work frightening them about the prospects of default. More concerned about his election prospects than resolving this crisis, President Obama commented recently that he could not guarantee Treasury would be able to make Social Security payments in early August.

Really? This fearmongering is shameful—absolutely shameful. For the President to threaten not to send out Social Security checks is a stain on his

Presidency. Those relying on Social Security benefits rightfully count on timely payments. They worked hard and paid taxes, and timely benefit payments are due to them. These payments can and should be assured, no question.

Why is the President using the politics of fear on our seniors? I think we all know the reason. Given the information that is available, it appears that roughly \$50 billion of Social Security payments are due during August. Recent estimates from outside sources put flows in the Treasury of between \$170 billion and over \$200 billion in August from various tax receipts and other sources. That alone is more than enough to pay \$50 billion in Social Security payments, with cash left over for the \$30 billion due on our debt in August and more.

Perhaps the President is worried about the timing of cashflows in August. Yet even if all \$50 billion of Social Security payments come due on August 3—and they won't—Treasury can easily get its hands on cash to pay those bills. According to the Daily Treasury Statement for July 26, Treasury has \$5 billion sitting idle at the Federal Reserve. Treasury can call that up. They can call up the Fed right now and get that \$5 billion in cash.

Treasury has roughly \$90 billion in mortgage-backed securities that it bought in the financial crisis to bail out the housing markets. It sold \$10.6 billion of those just last month. Treasury can go out and sell more next week if it is worried about not having cash to pay seniors. It could raise almost \$80 billion.

There are many more options for Treasury to get cash, and if the administration had any concern for seniors it would have had its officials working hard since at least May to ensure enough cash is available in August. Treasury could easily have \$50 billion of cash on August 3 to pay our seniors if it wants to do that.

Why, then, did the President choose to strike fear into all of our Nation's seniors? Why would the President say to our seniors that he could not guarantee there would be cash available to pay benefits in August when he can absolutely guarantee there would be cash available?

It seems clear the President has chosen to use fear and to scare seniors in order to boost his chances at reelection and to strengthen the hand of our friends on the other side who are insistent on raising taxes as a means of deficit reduction. If we raise taxes, I guarantee you the other side will spend every dime of it. It will not be used to pay down the deficit, and especially with a Presidential election in a couple of years.

Using Social Security and the financial security of our seniors as bargaining chips in a political poker game over the debt ceiling is, to put it bluntly, shameful. To do so to try to raise taxes at a time when unemployment is

9.2 percent and trending up—and that doesn't even include the underemployment rate, which is hovering around 17 percent when you count those who will not even look for jobs anymore, and others who will not work—well, it represents an odd way to express concern about jobs.

The only reason Social Security payments would not be made in August by the administration would be a conscious choice by the administration to stiff seniors and to blame Republicans. It would be a conscious political choice, not a choice forced by the debt limit or lack of cash.

Well, Mr. President, it is time for me to conclude, but I want to be clear. The American public has been shortchanged by the new Financial Stability Oversight Council that was created by the job-killing Dodd-Frank financial regulation act. That is one of the worst bills I have seen in all of my 35 years.

The FSOC, chaired by Treasury Secretary Geithner, has refused and ignored my request for basic information about government finances and government contingency plans in the face of dire warnings of threats to our Nation's financial stability.

I don't enjoy coming on the Senate floor and excoriating this administration and the President and FSOC. But this is shameful. The American people deserve transparency, and they deserve accountability. Yet the administration and its regulators chose instead to withhold information from the people and their elected representatives in Congress. The refusal by members of FSOC, including the Treasury Secretary, to provide simple basic information about government finances is unacceptable and requires investigation and action.

Mr. President, we have to get to where this government starts to work again. We shouldn't have to rely on Wall Street for these figures or rely on Wall Street to know what the administration's plan is. We shouldn't have to rely on anybody except those who are designated to provide this information. Unfortunately, they haven't done that.

I admit, I only gave them a few days, but they have been working on this for months. I don't know about their office, but I tell you one thing. We get things done on time. We are at rug-cutting time on the floor of the Senate and in the House of Representatives. We know August 2 is the heralded date by this administration. Since they chose the date, I think they should justify what they are going to do and how they are going to do it; to make sure if we don't somehow increase the debt ceiling, which I am not going to do, we at least know what their plan is.

I hope the administration will get a little more active on some of these things that are so important on Capitol Hill—important to Democrats as well as Republicans. We need to have the facts. We need accountability, we need transparency, and I am calling on the administration to get on the ball.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the urgent need to act on the debt ceiling before the August 2 deadline. While I believe we have reached a defining moment as a country, which has not been wasted—we need to reduce our debt—we also can't afford to play Russian roulette with our economy by toying with the debt limit.

We have had months to work this out. Yet less than 6 days from a possible default that would plunge this country into a serious crisis, here we stand in opposite corners of the boxing ring. The markets are jittery, investors and businesses are deeply concerned, but, most importantly, the people of this country are fed up with this political stalemate. They do not want their interest rates to rise, the value of the dollar to fall, and they do not want to see their retirement savings decimated again because some in Washington believe if they refuse to compromise, the resulting crisis will score them political points.

Ever since the economic downturn, families across the country have sat down at their kitchen tables to make the tough choices about what they hold most dear and what they can learn to live without. We all know those conversations. They have to end with compromise.

A poll released Monday by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 68 percent of Americans say lawmakers who share their views on this issue, on either side, say those lawmakers should compromise. So people who actually share a view with a particular lawmaker, 68 percent of them say lawmakers should compromise, even if it means striking a deal they disagree with.

Just 23 percent say lawmakers who share their views should stand by their principles even if it leads to default.

My colleagues and I don't need polls to tell us that. We have all had our offices flooding with calls and e-mails in the last few days from well-meaning constituents with advice and from those who are mad and asking us to work it out. Just this morning I received this e-mail from Dave and Cheryl of Northfield, MN. This is what it says:

Dear Amy,

The political positioning and wrangling over the Federal Budget and debt ceiling limit has gone on long enough! It's time for our elected leaders to step up and resolve the debt ceiling and budget crisis in a mature, adult fashion. We realize that this is easier said than done, but after experiencing the shutdown of the State of Minnesota, it is unconscionable to even have the possibility of

the crisis that we will face as a nation if we don't raise our debt ceiling and begin reducing the deficit. We urge you and your colleagues to do all it takes to resolve this issue prior to the deadline. There has to be some compromise that can be identified. Each side will need to give to make this happen—let's focus on the art of compromise and get this wrapped up. It's time to show the world that we are still a truly great nation and can step up to resolve the challenges placed before us. The greater good of the nation has to be placed as a top priority. Hoping and praying for successful resolution to the outstanding issues.

That is Dave and Cheryl of Northfield, MN—just citizens who sent an e-mail today. I wish everyone in this Chamber and everyone over in the House would listen to this today. I think it sums it up very well.

Outside the Halls of Congress there isn't much disagreement over the urgency to act or the consequences of failing to do so. There also isn't a lot of disagreement over the importance to our economy of a long-term extension. Who seriously believes dragging this country through this again in 5 or 6 months will help our economy get back on track?

Economists and experts from across the political spectrum have warned that a short-term approach would likely lead to a downgrade of our credit rating, which would cost us billions of dollars more in interest payments on our existing debt and drive up our deficit. For families and businesses, it would mean a spike in interest rates, making everything from mortgages, car loans, and credit cards more expensive.

I think the most common refrain I hear from the business community in Minnesota when we talk about what it will take to spur investment and create jobs in this country is a need for certainty—certainty in the Tax Code, certainty in expenses, certainty in our government's budget. Let's provide some certainty.

After months of debate, it is clear what sort of plan is needed to garner the support necessary to get us across the finish line. We will all ultimately have to accept things with which we don't necessarily agree. It is time to get serious about advancing a deal that is both fair and achievable.

On August 2, the borrowing authority of the United States will be exhausted. No one benefits if we are unable to reach an agreement by this deadline. Every day that passes without a deal only increases uncertainty in the markets and puts the brakes on economic activity. Failure to bring the national debt under control also threatens America's future, but the danger of default threatens our economy today.

We have two options: We can either set a precedent of holding our debt hostage to political maneuvering, raising the cost of borrowing and increasing our deficit at the same time or we can show the world we are serious about working together to address our fiscal challenges to reduce the debt, reduce

the cost of borrowing, and strengthen our financial outlook. I believe the choice is clear, and I believe a lot of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle know that.

The sooner we can agree on a long-term package, the better for our economy and the better for our country. It is time to put our political differences aside and work on an agenda that strengthens our economy, promotes fiscal responsibility, and increases global competitiveness because if we refuse to have an honest conversation, if we insist on using the debate as a vehicle for rhetoric only, we will not just be doing ourselves a disservice, not just be doing this institution a disservice, we will be cheating our children and grandchildren out of knowing the America in which we grew up. If we are committed to our country and not to unmoving ideologies, we will get this done.

Last month, I received a lesson in what commitment as a public servant means when I attended the funeral of Jack Murray, who was the former mayor of International Falls, MN, right on the Canadian border. It is a town where they often test cars to show that they can withstand the cold, but it is a hardscrabble, thriving town.

Mayor Murray was a decorated marine who served for 14 years as a member of the city council and for 14 more years as mayor. He figuratively and literally wore "I love International Falls" on his sleeve with a button he was never without. At his funeral—and he was 89 years when he died—we heard countless stories of his commitment to his city that didn't end when he retired. The priest at the funeral told this story. He said that every morning, including the morning Mayor Murray died, he would rise early and walk the streets of International Falls. He would wear his orange highway vest to keep him safe, at 89, and he would have a cup of coffee and a bag for trash, and he would walk the streets of his beloved town collecting trash up until the day he died. He was a public servant to the end. He believed in his town, in his State, and in his country. And that is an example for all of us now.

We are all public servants. We must have a commitment to the larger good, to our country, and to the people we represent. None of us wants to see our economy crippled. Democrats don't want it. Republicans don't want it. So what are we waiting for? It is time for Congress to step forth and show some leadership. It is time for us to work together to show the American people that Washington isn't broken; that, instead, we are willing to put aside our politics to do what we were elected to do, to do what is right for America.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period of morning business be extended until 8:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each and, further, that at 8:30 I be recognized.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. The reason we are extending morning business is the House is having trouble passing the bill, I understand, and so we are waiting until action is taken. They started at 4:30, and it is taking longer than they anticipated. As I understand, they have another caucus in which they are now engaged. It is 7 o'clock, so that is why I thought that at 8:30 we would have a better idea whether they are going to take action tonight.

Again, I would suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, we are here awaiting the action of the House of Representatives. We don't know whether the House is going to pass the JOHN BOEHNER proposal, but regardless of what they do, we have the solution right underneath our noses. There have been discussions today. I have had a number of discussions with our colleagues. I have had a discussion first this morning with my colleague from Florida and I have had discussions with others.

It seems to me the obvious solution, since we are now at the eleventh hour and getting close to the 59th minute of the eleventh hour, is that we take elements of the Reid proposal, the McConnell proposal, and the Boehner proposal. So I would suggest our leadership consider, regardless of what happens in the House—because the Senate is going to have to act on something to get 60 votes to meet the filibuster threshold in this Chamber and then send a package back to the House. I would suggest it be this: that we take the Reid proposal which includes the larger amount of spending cuts. Senator REID at first said that is \$2.7 trillion. Maybe it has been by CBO marked down to about \$2.2 trillion. But whatever that larger amount—clearly larger

than the Boehner proposal, even though some would argue it is the Iraq and Afghanistan war wind-down savings we would get, but whatever it is, it is larger than the House proposal—and use that as the first cut by lifting the debt ceiling. But there would be a sequence of events that would happen after that to avoid what the Senate Democrats do not want, which is that the markets and the rating agencies cause the debt instruments—the U.S. Treasury bills—to be downgraded. There needs to be certainty for those rating agencies, for the U.S. Government debt, and it could be achieved this way: We have a BRAC-like committee—that being a committee that would be composed equally of Republicans and Democrats—that would come up with a package that would then come back to each House, no amendments, for an up-or-down vote.

The fail-safe backup, in case that committee were not able to come to agreement or in the event that it came back to both Houses and one of the Houses did not pass it, that we would then have the McConnell proposal, which is that the President would request the increase of the debt and there would be this procedure that Senator MCCONNELL laid out that there would be a resolution of disapproval. If there were such a disapproval, then the President, of course, could veto it. In order for the President's veto to be overridden, there would have to be a two-thirds vote. There would not be a two-thirds vote, and, therefore, there is the assurance that we would have the raising of the debt ceiling to get us through this next year and a half.

It seems as though it is right under our nose, if the parties will just realize that now is the time we have to act to find a workable solution so we can get the votes.

If we can get, with that kind of proposal, 60 votes in the Senate, then it goes down to the House, whether they pass the Boehner proposal or not. At the eleventh hour and the 59th minute, recognizing what is at stake for the country, then the House of Representatives is going to do the right thing and they are going to pass it.

I am just a little country boy, but it seems to me sometimes we get so wrapped up in all the intricate details that the obvious solution is right there under our nose, staring us in the face. I respectfully request the Senate consider this.

I yield the floor.

CRISIS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise today to bring attention to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa. More than 11 million people—twice the population of my State of Maryland—are now in need of emergency assistance to survive.

Large portions of the Horn of Africa region are now in the grip of one of the worst humanitarian crises in the re-

gion in recent decades. Nearly half of the population in Somalia is in urgent need of assistance, and malnutrition rates are on the rise in neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya. Without the immediate action of the international community, it is projected that an additional 180,000 people will perish in the coming months due to the drought and famine.

It is difficult to fully comprehend the levels of human suffering currently occurring in the region, as refugees flee famine-affected areas. People are literally walking for days without food and water to try to reach food and safety. More than 166,000 desperate Somalis are estimated to have fled their country to neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia in recent months—approximately 3,500 people are arriving every day at refugee camps in those countries compounding the already tenuous humanitarian situation in the region.

On July 21, the United Nations declared a famine in two regions in southern Somalia. This declaration is not done lightly and is the first declared since 1992. Famine is only declared when acute child malnutrition rates exceed 30 percent and more than 2 people per 10,000 die per day. The U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID, reports that the under-5 death rates in southern Somalia are higher than 4 children per 10,000 per day in all areas and as high as 13 to 20 per 10,000 per day in areas of south central Somalia. Already, outbreaks of measles, cholera, and watery diarrhea have been reported in affected areas as well. Unless this is addressed immediately through immunization campaigns and medical treatment, more people will perish from these preventable diseases.

The United States is one of the largest donors of emergency assistance to the region, helping more than 4.4 million of those in need and providing over \$431 million since last October. The actions taken by our Nation and the international community in anticipation of the drought last year has helped save countless lives. Through the Famine Early Warning System, we saw data come in, and we were able to move resources into the region and implement programs to provide food in critically affected areas throughout the Horn of Africa. However, emergency assistance alone cannot solve the underlying long-term problems. The United States continues to provide longer term development assistance through Feed the Future and other programs, which are working in the region to address the root causes of hunger and malnutrition.

USAID Administrator Shah was in Kenya last week and met with Somali refugees there. He met with a woman who had traveled for 33 days by foot with her two children and suffered a robbery along the way, in order to arrive at a refugee camp in Kenya and have access to safety, food, and basic human security. He also visited with a 4-year-old boy who, in the acute malnutrition wing of the hospital at the